

Charles L. Brewer Award for Distinguished Teaching of Psychology: R. Eric Landrum



Citation

“R. Eric Landrum is an inspiring, passionate teacher, a productive scholar, and a tireless crusader for education. A skilled orator, he works hard to further the craft of teaching, inspiring his colleagues to be the best teachers they can be and motivating his students to learn. Eric is an authority on careers for psychology majors and his know-how on this topic is sought after around the country. His interests in skill development, assessment, and the importance of preparing students for the workforce and arming them with psychological science have resulted in significant changes to the lives of students and educators worldwide.”

Biography

Growing up in the North Chicago suburb of Grayslake, Illinois, R. Eric Landrum had no idea of the advantages of a typical middle-class upbringing. During Eric’s childhood, his father, Al, retired from the U.S. Navy at the rank of senior chief petty officer (Al dropped out of high school to fight in World War II); he then went to work for a local employer as an electronics engineer. Eric’s mother, Alice, was a homemaker most of the time during Eric’s childhood (she did complete high school and attended Southern Illinois University—Car-

bondale for 1½ years studying to be a teacher), often expressing her creative talents through various artistic media. Eric’s older siblings George, Ray, and Janet are all successful in their own right, and they certainly made the path easier to pursue college by the time Eric was ready.

It was during Eric’s undergraduate career at Monmouth College, a small, private liberal arts institution in Monmouth, Illinois, that most of the themes of his professional career took root. Small classes taught by dedicated instructors demonstrated firsthand the meaning of student-centered. In the Department of Psychology, three key role models were influential in helping Eric see his future self as a college professor. The balance in valuing both teaching and research by these faculty members was also evident, because these individuals were excellent teachers and generative scholars. An important developmental moment for Eric was the opportunity to present his research, coauthored with Monmouth faculty member Charles Meliska, at the 1985 Midwestern Psychological Association meeting in Chicago, Illinois. Leadership opportunities blossomed for Eric at Monmouth College. He joined Psi Chi in December 13, 1983, and during his senior year was selected to serve as the chapter president.

After graduating from Monmouth College in 1985 with bachelor’s degrees in psychology and speech communication and theater arts, Eric attended Southern Illinois University—Carbondale from 1985 to 1989 (the same institution that his mother and his sister had attended), enrolling in the Experimental Psychology Program. He earned his PhD in cognitive psychology. Although not always easy, the teaching—research balance continued in graduate school. During his last semester, Eric served as the full-time sabbatical replacement for the professor who administered the introduction to psychology course to 1,400 students. After receiving his PhD in 1989, he began his professorial career at the University of Wisconsin—Platteville as an assistant professor. After 3 years at UW—Platteville (and the very rewarding experience of taking his first-ever research students to the Midwestern Psychological Association so that they could present their coauthored research), he departed for Boise State University in Boise, Idaho, in 1992.

Eric was fortunate that Boise State values any type of meaningful scholarship—including the scholarship of teaching and learning. Being student-centered and having the inherent desire to achieve a teaching—research balance has remained Eric’s desired educational perspective. Conducting research about how to be a better teacher makes

perfect sense to Eric; conducting research about what factors and conditions help students achieve success fits perfectly within an approach of being student-centered. At Boise State, Eric's program of research is "eclectic." In an informal self-meta-analysis of published topics across his 30-year career, the major topical areas have included advising—career advice for undergraduates (graduate school-bound and psychology workforce-bound), including making the most of opportunities (e.g., research assistantships) and creating resources to promote student development and performance, improving pedagogical practice (including the benefits of assessment, issues surrounding textbook usage, and the importance of skills), larger departmental—disciplinary concerns (the impact of the introductory psychology course, measuring professorial effectiveness, studying civility, student retention, cultural diversity, institutional climate), and many others.

Many of these topics were explored with undergraduate research assistants as well as faculty collaborators from across the nation. Eric especially acknowledges his colleague and dear friend Regan A. R. Gurung for many collaborations, conversations, and concoctions yet to come.

Key opportunities (including leadership) afforded to Eric early in his academic career allowed for networking over time. Eric was a participant in the Psychology Partnerships Project (P3) hosted by James Madison University in 1999, and he was a group leader at the National Conference for Undergraduate Education in Psychology held at the University of Puget Sound in 2008. Eric was a member of the team that updated and created *APA Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major, Version 2.0* (American Psychological Association, 2013), and in 2014 then-APA President Nadine Kaslow presented Eric with an APA Presidential Citation.

As a faculty member, Eric was honored to serve as president of the Council of Teachers of Undergraduate Psychology, president of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association, secretary and then president of the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (Division 2 of the American Psychological Association), and Rocky Mountain regional vice president and then president of Psi Chi (the international honor society in psychology). Service to others is his attempt to pay back his gratefulness for those opportunities that have been so generously afforded to Eric since the mid-1980s. Thirty years in the same profession can afford a special status (and perhaps enhanced self-confidence) to attempt new endeavors. In October 2017 Eric cocreated the PsychSessions podcast with Garth Neufeld—a podcast where teachers of psychology are interviewed and teaching ideas are promoted and celebrated. During his 2017–2018 sabbatical year, Eric founded PsychChamps, Inc., a 501(c)(3) educational nonprofit organization dedicated to generating and providing resources, advocacy, and support for undergraduate psychology students, majors, alumni, and educators.

Of course, all of this is possible with the love and support of family. Since being married by an Elvis impersonator in Las Vegas in August 2016, Eric has lived with his lovely wife, Lisa, in Meridian, Idaho. Lisa is employed as the volunteer—foster coordinator for the West Valley Humane Society, where she works to ensure that volunteers are properly trained and animals in need of foster care are provided excellent rehabilitative services. Together their blended family consists of Eric's adult children, Allison and Scott, and Lisa's adult children, Alyssa and Alex.

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